

Notes for Introductory Remarks at the
SMEs and ICTs Workshop

IDRC
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Distinguished guests, friends, and colleagues—good morning to you all and welcome. Let me express our particular appreciation to the Minister of Economy, Industry and Trade of Costa Rica for participating in this event. On behalf of IDRC, allow me to say that it is a privilege and a pleasure for us to host this important workshop.

Today's workshop, focussing on small and medium enterprises (or SMEs) and the use of information and communication technologies to improve their competitiveness, is in our view timely and relevant for this year — in particular for the fourth Summit of the Americas and the World Summit on the Information Society — and for later this week, when IDRC's "Unleashing Entrepreneurship" conference will take place.

Some government aid agencies (CIDA among them, to its credit) are explicitly recognizing the place of the private sector in accelerating economic growth for development. This global conference will point to many compelling research questions, including those spelled out in the Martin-Zedillo report, and help address the fact that the business sector, including small and medium enterprises, has been neglected for too long as essential participants in generating economic growth in developing countries.

Complementing the global "Unleashing Entrepreneurship" conference, today's workshop focuses regionally on SMEs in Canada and Central America, and how ICTs can accelerate economic growth for development that is sustainable and equitable in that region.

IDRC is no stranger to the topic. At IDRC—an institution founded more than 30 years ago to promote research for development, in developing countries,—we focus on making the practical connections between knowledge and policy, learning and action. IDRC has been working to understand how ICTs can transform lives, in particular those of people in developing countries. Even the IDRC Act, formulated in 1970, makes explicit reference to the use of information and communication networks to promote development.

Since the early nineties—before "digital divide" had become a commonplace expression — IDRC has been supporting the most advanced information and communication technologies for

development — acknowledging that economic and social development is propelled by technological applications based on sound research and governed by sound policy. We have found that closing the loop on research, policy, and practice is one of the inescapable prerequisites of development.

That being said, we hope to help close the loop on SMEs using ICTs for development in Central America — by allowing you, the experts from government, the private sector, civil society, and academic institutions, to discuss and review the work undertaken to date, and identify the path forward for SMEs to adopt the right technological tools, within an enabling environment, to foster sustainable development in the region.

Again, I welcome you and I wish you a successful and productive day. Thank you.